Appl. No. 09/756,570
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AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

Claims 1-4 (canceled)

Claim 5 (currently amended): ~~The~~ A method of implementing a control channel for exchanging information between switching devices in a packet switched Gigabit Ethernet network, comprising:

selecting an unused portion of an 8 octet preamble frame of a packet format used for communicating between switching devices, ~~as defined in claim 4~~ wherein ~~said~~ a third octet of said preamble frame containing ~~contains~~ a special code to signify that following frames contain control information; and

embedding the control information in the unused portion.

Claim 6 (original): The method as defined in claim 5, wherein said control information is embedded in three octets following said third octet.

Claim 7 (original) The method as defined in claim 6, wherein said three octets having embedded control information have a distinctive high order bit.

Claim 8 (currently amended) The method as defined in claim 5 [[1]] wherein said switching devices are managed as a group of switches in a clustered arrangement.

Claim 9 (original) The method as defined in claim 8 wherein said control information relates to disable and enable flow control.

Claim 10 (original) The method as defined ni claim 8 wherein said control information relates to transmission of priority packets between switching devices.

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Claim 11 (original): The method as defined in claim 8 wherein said control information relates to results of a hash algorithm implemented as between ports within said cluster.

Claim 12 (original) The method as defined in claim 8 wherein said control information relates to ports making up a mirrored pair involving a switch cluster.

Claim 13 (original) The method as defined in claim 8 wherein said control information relates to multicast packet protocols distributed to cluster switches within said network.

Claim 14 (currently amended) A system for implementing a control channel for use in exchanging information between switching devices in a packet switched ~~Gigabit Ethernet~~ <u>Gigabit Ethernet</u> ~~communications~~-network comprising:

    means to select an unused portion of a packet format used to carry communication between switching devices<u>, the unused portion being an 8 octet preamble framea third octet of the preamble contains a special code to signify that following frames contain control information;</u> and

    means to embed control information in the unused portion.

Claims 15-16 (canceled)